

How NOT to fall into the booby trap!

This list comprises some of the most common mistakes made by Luxembourg students of English on the levels of II^e and I^e and should aim at helping them prepare their tests and exams to their own and their teachers' satisfaction. I would like to thank my colleague Vic Mousel for his valuable contribution.

Marc WEIS, Teacher of English Language and Literature (LCD)

1. Irregular Verbs (Form and spelling)

to lose	lost	lost		> a loss (Verlust)
		≠ to loosen	(losbinden)	> loose (adj.) (locker, frei)
to choose	chose	chosen		> a choice (Wahl)
to lie	lay	lain	(liegen)	> to lie in bed
≠ to lie	lied	lied	(lügen)	> to tell a lie
to lay	laid	laid	(legen)	> to lay the table
to lead	led	led		
to read	read	read		
to build	built	built		
to pay	paid	paid		> a payment
to become	became	become	(werden)	
(In summer it doesn't become / get dark until 10.00 pm.)				
(I'm going to become a doctor when I have finished my university studies.)				
Never use 'get' in this context!				
to get	got	got	(werden, bekommen)	
(Sarah got a new bicycle for her birthday.) (Never use 'become' in this context!)				

2. Regular Verbs (Meaning and spelling)

to remember (sth.) > sich an etwas erinnern

(I'm awfully sorry, but I can't **remember** your name.)

(**Remember** to post my letters please!)

to remind sb. of sth. / to do sth > jem. (an etwas) erinnern (etwas zu tun)

(I **reminded** him **of** his promise.)

(When he left the house, I **reminded** him to post my letters.)

to say (sth.): Don't say you can't come to my birthday party!

He said that he would come to my party.

to tell (sb. sth.): Tell me the truth.

He told his mother that he would get married in June.

to live: life (n.) > lives (pl.) > to be alive / a live show / the living (die Lebenden)

Those poor people lost their **lives** in this accident. (Also mind the plural!)

to die: A good friend of mine **died** in an accident last week.

He is **dying**, you can't do anything for him.
death (n.) / dead (adj.) / a dead person > the dead (die Toten)
to notice (zur Kenntnis nehmen) ≠ to remark (mündlich oder schriftlich erwähnen)

to **prefer** > preferring / preferred
to **refer** > referring / referred BUT: to **offer** > offering / offered
(When the stress is on the last syllable, the final 'r' is DOUBLED!)

This is also the case with other consonants preceded by a single stressed vowel:

to plan > **planning** / planned // to swim > **swimming**
to commit > **committing** / He **committed** a crime / suicide

But: to **develop** > **developing** / **developed**
to **mention** > **mentioning** / **mentioned**
to **profit** > **profiting** / **profited**

Remember that in British English the final 'l' is always doubled, whether stressed or not.

to **travel** > **travelling** / **travelled**
to **quarrel** > **quarrelling** / **quarrelled** etc...
to **control** > **controlling** / **controlled**
to **fulfil**: **fulfilled** / **fulfilling** // But: a **fulfilment**

Special case: be careful!

to **panic** > **panicking** / **panicked**
to **picnic** > **picnicking** / **picnicked**

to **prove** (beweisen): a **proof** > **proofs** (pl.)
to **believe** (in) sth. (glauben (an etwas)): > a **belief** > **beliefs**

to **destroy**: He **destroyed** the plans after he had read them.
> **destruction** (n) > **destructive** (adj)

to **welcome** / **welcomed** / **welcomed**: He **welcomed** his guests at the front door.

to **compare** / to **prepare** / to **repair**

to **repeat** > a repetition

to **speak** > a **speech**

to **pronounce** > **pronunciation** // to **denounce** > **denunciation**

to **address** sb. > an address

to **exaggerate**

to **analyse** (analyze) > an **analysis** > **analyses** (pl.)

to **separate**

to **guarantee**: > a **guarantee for** sth

to **personify** > a **personification**

to **divide** > a **division**

to **criticize** > a **critic** (ein Kritiker) / a **critique** (eine Kritik) / **criticism**

to **characterize** > a **character** / to be **characteristic for**

to **provoke** > a **provocation**

to **acquire** > an **acquisition** (erwerben)

to **disturb** > a **disturbance** (stören)

to **disappear** > a **disappearance**

to **evolve** (and not: to **evolute**!!) > an **evolution**

to evaluate > an evaluation
to **ridicule** (and not: to ridicule!!)
to argue > an argument
to threaten sb. with a weapon (to menace) (bedrohen) ≠ to treat (behandeln) !!!
> a threat / a menace
to quote > a quotation

3. Verbs and prepositions / nouns and prepositions

to explain sth. **to** sb > an explanation
to suffer **from** an illness (leiden an)
to die **of / from** a wound (sterben an)
to dispose **of** old clothes (wegwerfen) > disposal
to approve **of** a decision (billigen) > approval
to abuse **of** sb.'s trust (mißbrauchen)
to deal **with** a subject (sich befassen mit; behandeln)
to accuse (sb.) **of** (committing) a crime
to charge sb. **with** a crime
to apologize **to** sb. **for** coming late / one's bad behaviour
(But: Would you please **excuse** my bad behaviour?)
to reproach sb. **with / for** doing sth.
to talk / to speak **to/with** sb. **about** sth. (Preferably use 'to' instead of 'with'.)
to profit / to benefit **from** sb. or sth./**by** sth.
to arrive/be **on** time ≠ to be late
to accept (responsibility) **for** sth.
to have difficulty (**in**) doing sth.
to **succeed in** doing sth. / to manage **to** do sth.
to find a means **of / a way of** doing sth.
to have the opportunity **of / the chance of** doing sth.
to have an unquenchable thirst **for** power

4. Adjectives and prepositions

confronted **with / faced with** (difficulties)
fascinated **by/ with**
angry **at / with**
conscious **of // aware of** > consciousness / awareness
typical **of**
responsible **for** > responsibility (Mind the spelling!!!)
used/accustomed **to doing** sth. (gewohnt sein) ≠ he used **to do** (er tat es immer früher)
symbolical **of**
dependent **on** ≠ independent **of** (Mind the spelling!!!)
tired **of / exhausted of**
fed up **with**
involved **in**
(in)capable **of** (doing) sth. > to have the capacity **to** do sth.
(un)able **to** (do) sth. > to have the ability **to** do sth.
(**im**)possible to > to have the possibility **of** doing sth.
interested **in** (doing) sth. > to show/have an interest **in** sth.

jealous / envious **of** > jealousy / envy
proud **of** (doing) sth. > **pride** (n)
afraid / frightened **of**
(un)necessary **for** (Mind the spelling of 'necessary'!!!) > (un)necessarily

5. Prepositions

during (= preposition) his holidays ≠ **while** (= conjunction) he was on holiday
throughout the novel / the story / the poem / the play (Do not use 'during'!!)
on the contrary ≠ contrary **to** (what he said)
among a crowd of people
between the table and the chair

6. General spelling problems

to advise (raten) > a piece of **advice**
to practise the piano > He has a lot of **practice**
aggressive > aggressiveness (NOT: aggressivity!!)
adjective
medicine
enemy > enemies
catastrophe > catastrophes / simile > similes
irony > ironic(al)
egocentric (adj.)
egoistical (adj.)
committee (Vorstand)
to rhyme > a rhyme
rhythm > a rhythmical pattern
fate (Schicksal) ≠ **faith** (Glaube)
murder (Mord) ≠ murderer (Mörder)
for example
therefore (That's why)
welfare state (Wohlfahrtsstaat)
ambiguous > ambiguity (n.) / continuous > continuity (n.)
high > height (n.)
to weigh (wiegen) > weight (n.)
prisoner > imprisonment
ecstasy > ecstatic (adj.)
agreeable
proposal (Vorschlag) (and NOT: 'proposition'!!)
parallel (n)
busy > business
inhuman
insufficient
capitalist (adj. **and** n.)
politician > political (adj.) > politics (n.s.)

7. Spelling and confusion of meaning

another (noch ein(e)...)(written in ONE word!!!) ≠ **a different** (ein(e) andere(r))

(He showed me another picture of his sister.) (= one more)

(He showed me a different picture of the same man.)

to / two / too

(John, you **too** can come **to** see me at **two** o'clock. And don't be **too** late again!)

beneficent (wohltätig) ≠ beneficial (vorteilhaft)

economic (adj.) (wirtschaftlich) ≠ economical (adj.) ≠ sparsam

disposal(n) (.....) ≠ disposition

also / too / not....either

I **also** want to go to the cinema. = I want to go to the cinema, **too**. (pos. meaning)

I **don't** want to go to the cinema **either**. (neg. meaning)

then ≠ than

He first said she was a bitch. **Then** he told her to leave.

Paris is a more beautiful city **than** London.

consciousness (Bewußtsein) ≠ conscience (Gewissen)

to learn (lernen) ≠ to teach (taught/taught) (lehren)

(The teacher first **taught** the students the past tense and then he told them to **learn** the irregular verbs.)

to fear (fürchten) ≠ to frighten sb. (jem. erschrecken)

also (auch) ≠ although (obschon)

sympathetic (mitfühlend) ≠ pleasant / friendly (sympathisch)

She was quite **sympathetic** when she heard about his incurable illness.

John is such a **pleasant** man / such a **friendly** person. Everybody likes him.

a **play** (Theaterstück) ≠ a **game** (Spiel)

to support a team (unterstützen) ≠ to bear pain (ertragen)

their (poss. adj.) ≠ **there** (da, dort)

its (poss. adj.) ≠ **it's** (it is / it has)

whose (relative pronoun) ≠ **who's** (who is, who has)

one's: to be on one's way back home ≠ **ones**: Give me some apples, but some good ones.

space (Platz): There isn't enough space in this room. ≠ **place** (Ort): Paris is a very nice place.

to be **happy** (glücklich / zufrieden sein) ≠ to be **lucky** (Glück haben)

habit (French: habitude)

every day (jeden Tag) ≠ everyday (problems) (alltäglich)

hole (n.) (Loch) ≠ **whole** (adj.) (ganz)

meaning (Bedeutung) ≠ **opinion** (Meinung)

as...as ≠ **more / ..erthan**

Michael is **as tall as** his father, but he is **smaller than** his brother.

8. Capitalization

* Country adjectives and nouns:

a **German** car / a **Greek** wine / the **English** patient

an **American** / an **Englishman** / a **Japanese**

- * Adjectives referring to religious adherence:
a **Puritan** attitude / a **Catholic** priest / a **Jewish** rabbi/ an **anti-Semitic** movement
a **Christian** / a **Jew** / a **Muslim**
- * Proper names (people, places, rivers, mountains, oceans, days, months, titles etc)
the **River Thames**, the **Caribbean**, **Mount Everest**, **Wednesday**, **January** etc.
- * Special cases
World War II, the **Second World War**, **God**, **Hell**, the **Internet**, the **F.B.I.** etc)

9. Grammar

- * **The third person singular (he, she, it) takes an 'S' in the present simple !!!**
to try > he tries / to envy > he envies
to play > he plays / to destroy > he destroys

- * **Knowing the irregular verb forms is a must !!!**

- * **There is NO EXCUSE for not knowing the rules of the IF-sentence!!!**
(‘IF’ (= When/ Whenever) + present tense > present tense (always true!!!)
‘IF’ + present tense > future (simple) (first conditional sentence)
‘IF’ + past tense > conditional I (second conditional sentence)
‘IF’ + past perfect > conditional II (third conditional sentence)

- * **No future or conditional in time clauses after the following conjunctions:**
when, whenever, until, till, once, as soon as, if, if not, unless

* Articles

No article before abstract nouns unless defined:

life / death / culture/ nature / progress/ freedom/ optimism, man, etc...

I'm very fond of **nature** because it gives me an impression of ultimate **freedom**.

but: I don't know anything about **the** life **of** Francis Drake.

No article with 'most':

Most people agree with my point of view.

Special case:

I always go **to church** on Sundays. (Purpose: in order to pray to God)

I'm going to visit **the church** as well. (Building: to have a look at the architecture)

Galileo was against **the Church**. (Institution) (Mind the capitalization!!)

Use the indefinite article with professions:

He became **a** writer in his later life.

A rule based on phonetics:

a utopia; **a** university (but: **an** umbrella)

Position of the indefinite article:

rather a good idea / quite a nice day / such a good friend / so beautiful a country

* **'S'- Genitive: Use the 's'-genitive with people and pet animals**

She is Nick's girlfriend.

But she is also a friend of Daisy's.

The girls' teacher was ill. (Regular plural > s')

It is the people's decision. (Irregular plural > 's)

* **Relative pronouns**

Use the relative pronoun **'THAT'** after: the first, the last, the only and a superlative form and after quantifiers like something, anything, nothing, everything, all.

The last train **that** leaves the station tonight goes to Paddington.

There was nothing **that** he could do about it.

'WHAT' can never be used as a relative pronoun.

He said that he had not been at the crime scene, **which** was not true.

(and NOT: what)

* **Inversion**

In sentences starting off with a negative/restrictive particle you must use 'to do' in the present and the past to invert the verb.

(in vain, seldom, rarely, hardly only, never, scarcely)

In vain **did I ask** him to keep his mouth shut.

Only when I told him the truth **did he realize** the scope of his actions.

* **Singular and Plural**

a Scot > two Scots (Scottish)

a Portuguese > two Portuguese

an Englishman > two Englishmen / a German > two Germans

a phenomenon > phenomena

a criterion > criteria

a medium > media

a crisis > crises

police (n./pl.): The police **are** coming to arrest the thief.

family / audience (n./s. or n./pl.): My family **is/are** coming with me.

life / death > are agreed with the noun.

Many people lost **their lives** in this dreadful terrorist attack.

Lots of soldiers met **their deaths** on the Second World War battlefields.

person > **people**

this woman > **these women**

this child > **these children** // **that child** > **those children**

(a) little money (singular uncountable) > **(a) few** coins (plural countable)

less money (weniger Geld) > **fewer** coins (wenigere Münzen)
a lot of / **much** money > a lot of / **many** coins

News, information, advice are singular + uncountable and cannot be used with the indefinite article . (The verb is in the singular.)

The news he gave me this morning **was** very bad indeed.

For the plural, use: **pieces of** news, information, advice

Politics, economics, mathematics, physics take a final 's', but are singular nouns and the verb is in the singular.

Economics **is** a rather difficult subject at school.

10. Expressions / Constructions

on **the** one handon **the** other (hand)

at the moment / time **when** ... (NOT: where)

the former (der erstgenannte) the latter (der letztgenannte)

a standard of **living** (NOT: life)

a point of view

to **make** a mistake / to **commit** a fault

to **do** sb. a favour

to go to war (NO article) / to be at war (with a country)

in the war

to some extent (Mind the preposition 'TO' and the spelling of 'EXTENT'!!!)

the **last two** payments (Mind the word order!)

It seems **as if it is / was** his mistake. (NOT: like)

You **had better go** home now. (Du tätest besser daran, jetzt nach Hause zu gehen.)

I **want you to go** home now. (NOT: I want that you go home.)

It is important / necessary that you **should** do your homework.

11. Style

Make an effort to replace the following expressions / verbs by better ones:

thing: feature, aspect, facet, element, characteristic

book: short-story, novel, play

to show: to present, to reveal, to disclose, to exhibit

to symbolize: to mirror, to reflect, to stand for